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Secrets: A Memoir of Vietnam and the Pentagon Papers

by [Daniel Ellsberg](#)

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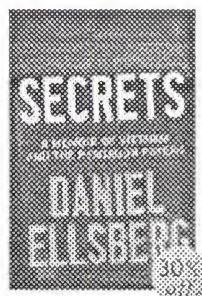
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From Library Journal

Before leaking the Pentagon Papers, which documented U.S. foreign-policy failures and deceit in Vietnam from 1945 to 1968, Ellsberg was a gung-ho advisor to the State and Defense departments. One fascinating part of this story is his growing disenchantment with the war during these years. He came to believe that leaking the top-secret papers and other classified documents was a patriotic act that could help end the war. Other fascinating aspects of this account include Ellsberg's frustrated... » [read more](#)

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★★★★★ **A must buy!**, October 17, 2002

Reviewer: **Eleanor LeCain** from Washington, D.C.

Daniel Ellsberg offers critical insights into how men in power can lead the United States into tragic war with unexpected and catastrophic consequences. A must read for every American as Bush pushes us to war in Iraq.

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20 of 20 people found the following review helpful:

★★★★★ **Spellbinding Recounting Of The Pentagon Papers Story!**, October 10, 2002

TOP 10 Reviewer: **Barron Laycock (Labradorman) (see more about Reviewer me)** from Temple, NH USA

After finding this book quite by accident while browsing through the wonderful Concord bookstore the other day, I was astounded to find how relevant and interesting a story author Daniel Ellsberg manages to conjure up after all this time regarding his legendary experience leading up to and including the leaking, release and publication of the infamous "Pentagon Papers" by the New York Times. As he explains early in the long yet

fascinating monologue, he fully expected to be sentenced to a long prison sentence for having secreted a copy of the highly classified Department of Defense's official history of the American Government's policy and involvement in Vietnam. The report was a damning confirmation of the worst fears of the anti-war movement, and provided overwhelming evidence of the cynical, manipulative, and deceitful character of our government and its deceit to its own people regarding its involvement.

What surprised Ellsberg most in all of this swirling excitement and activity was his own growing celebrity, and while he spent years fearing the worst for his own admitted culpability in defying criminal statutes by stealing and leaking official government secrets, eventually the charges against him were dropped based, among other things, on the revelations of the Nixon's plumber's unit's illegal break-in at Ellsberg's psychiatrist's office. Ellsberg was an unlikely hero, a graduate of the Harvard University economics doctoral program, a former marine officer turned defense issue intellectual, a frequent visitor to Vietnam who was rankled by the distinct difference between what he was seeing and experiencing during his visits, on the one hand, and what the official American government position regarding what the situation was on the ground on the other.

Based on this growing dissatisfaction and the discovery of the so-called Pentagon papers, a treasure trove of more than 7,000 pages of carefully documented details about the U.S. Government's involvement in Vietnam and its motives, considerations, and actions, Ellsberg tried to enlist the support of a number of Senators and Congressmen in an effort to use the evidence in the Pentagon Papers to undercut the Government's position and thereby end the war itself. Failing to do so, he finally surrendered the documents to the New York Times, which agreed to publish them through a series of daily excerpts (and also later in an abridged best-selling paperback version). The Government tried to stop publication, but was denied the right to do so by the Supreme Court. Of course, with the publication came an increase in public opposition to the war and a recognition of the degree to which the Executive branch and the military had intentionally misled the public regarding the conduct of the war and the situation on the ground for the moiré than 500,000 troops then stationed in-country. Still, it took more than five more years before the American involvement in Vietnam ended.

This is a wonderful book to experience, and in reading it one comes to recognize the formidable skills Ellsberg brings to bear in terms of his amazing recall, eye for details, and ability to successfully juggle a variety of interacting considerations at the same time. This guy is smarter than the average teddy bear, and it is easy to see how difficult a task it would have been for the Department of Defense and the nitwits over in the White House to try to outmaneuver him. I was a bit surprised at some of the personal revelations in the book, and while it is obvious that Mr. Ellsberg has a healthy ego, he manages for the most part to keep it at bay in retelling a story that could have easily have devolved in a retelling of the David against Goliath epic, but which he keeps objective and factual enough to keep the story rolling along as a recounting of the gripping events that transpired more than thirty years ago and helped to turn the tide of public opinion toward the war in Vietnam. I

heartily recommend this book to anyone interested in 20th century American history. Enjoy!

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 **Still a Jerk**, October 20, 2002

Reviewer: **A reader** from Covington, LA

Ellsberg's claim to fame is that he stole a government report about Vietnam from the Pentagon, and delivered copies to the New York Times and the Washington Post. For the last 30 years, he has been taking victory laps for that criminal act. His book is an argument that he and his partner, Anthony Russo, are as important to America as the Founding Fathers. The photos in the book are overwhelming evidence of Ellsberg's narcissism. Although he was a minor character at best in Vietnam, he pretends to be the focus of attention. His book is good in one respect: it reveals the self-righteousness of anti-war activists. Don't waste your money on this book.

Was this review helpful to you?

4 of 14 people found the following review helpful:

 **All Ellsberg would want you to know**, October 16, 2002

Reviewer: **Bruce P. Barten (see more about me)** from Saint Paul, MN United States

One of the photographs in this book shows Ellsberg, with the rapt attention of 14 children, holding a scarf. The caption says, "My knack for magic tricks always worked with kids in Vietnam." It is on the same page as a picture of "Randy Kehler giving the talk at Haverford College on August 28, 1969, that opened my eyes to the possibilities of resisting war." The big question, who looks less like a fool? 14 kids who don't know what is going on, or the portrait of Mahatma Gandhi (1869-1948) on the wall behind Randy, or Ellsberg having lunch with Henry Kissinger at San Clemente in August 1970, after Kissinger complemented Ellsberg on the Lowell Lecture series, "The Art of Coercion" which Ellsberg had given to Kissinger's seminar at Harvard in 1959, when Ellsberg got to explain Hitler: "Hitler had deliberately cultivated among his adversaries the impression of his own irrational unpredictability. He couldn't be counted on not to carry out a threat to do something crazy, mutually destructive." (p. 344).

Secret activities generate an aura, THOU SHALT NOT ADMIT, which

Daniel Ellsberg's book, *SECRETS*, is all about. Early in the book, on pages 7 to 20, the cable traffic of August 4, 1964, from Captain John J. Herrick in the Gulf of Tonkin, is explained as Ellsberg attempted to figure out what it meant from the Pentagon. The information provided is far less complete than in *TONKIN GULF AND THE ESCALATION OF THE VIETNAM WAR* by Edwin E. Moise, which analyzed the radar "skunks" picked up by the destroyers and the confusion caused by their inability to decide whether there had been three or five '(The fact that "N," "O," and "P" never got within twenty miles of the destroyers has been downplayed or completely ignored by most of the authors who have interpreted these skunks as North Vietnamese PT boats waiting in ambush for the destroyers.)' (Moise, p. 120). Mostly I think Ellsberg is wrong, as information coming from the government is typically wrong in ways that protect intelligence gathering sources and methods, about "intercepted North Vietnamese cables supposedly confirming an August 4 attack actually referred to the attack on August 2." (Ellsberg, p. 10). It seems far more likely to me that North Vietnamese cables confirming an attack on August 4 actually referred to a covert OPLAN 34A maritime operation 70 miles from the Maddox and the Turner Joy, about which McNamara testified to the Senate Foreign Relations Committee in 1968, "that the President had announced publicly on 3 August that our patrol would continue and consist of two destroyers. It is difficult to believe, in the face of that announcement, and its obvious purpose of asserting our right to freedom of the seas, that even the North Vietnamese could connect the patrol of the Maddox and the Turner Joy with ... action taking place some 70 miles away." (Moise, pp. 104-5). The secret circus stunt interpretation that I'm inclined to believe was that it was American intelligence which, interpreting cable intercepts of North Vietnamese reactions to the covert operation, convinced Captain Herrick 70 miles away that he was about to be attacked.

Ellsberg's book, *SECRETS*, has an index which lists a lot of people and incidents, but I found it a bit confusing on the major questions of our lifetimes. Checking out "Kennedy, John F.: assassination of, 194, 272," the emotional outpourings on pages listed seem to apply more to Bobby than to JFK. "Being his own man in the Senate after losing his brother, and with his father disabled, must have had a lot to do with it." (p. 194) He quotes Bobby on Nam, "We didn't want to lose in Vietnam or get out. We wanted to win if we could. But my brother was determined never to send ground combat units to Vietnam." (pp. 194-5). A lot of people concerned about Nam in 1961, when the number of American military troops assigned there started to increase into the thousands, had trouble seeing a distinction between advisers and soldiers actually taking part in a war, and the distinction was not that American troops would only fire if they were fired upon. On the other assassinations in November, 1963, Ellsberg wrote:

Lansdale left Vietnam, and Diem and his brother were eventually assassinated in a U.S.-authorized coup, in which, ironically, Lansdale's former CIA team member Lucien Conein was the liaison between the coup plotters and the American ambassador, Henry Cabot Lodge, who strongly favored the coup. (p. 99).

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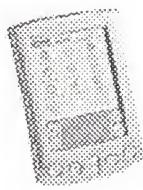
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